

Karma



Lev Tolstoy

Karma by Lev Tolstoy

["Karma" is the Buddhist belief that not only character traits of every human being, but also the whole fate of the current life is the consequence of his actions in his previous life, and that the same way good or evil of our future life will depend on our efforts to avoid evil and commit the good deeds, that we accomplish in this life. (L. N. Tolstoy.)]

I am sending you translated by me the Buddhist fairy tale entitled "Karma" from the American magazine "Open Court". I really like this sweet fairy tale because it is both naive and deep. Especially nice its explanation of the truth, lately too often obscured by different parties, that the deliverance from evil and obtaining the benefits are achieved only by your own efforts, and that there isn't and can't be such a device by means of which (beside your personal efforts), your own or the common good could be achieved. This clarification is particularly good because it immediately shows that the benefit of an individual is a true blessing only when it benefits all. As soon as the robber, coming out from hell, wished to benefit himself alone, his benefit ceased to be a boon, and he dropped down. This little fairy tale highlights from new side of two main, open by Christianity, truths: that the life is only in renouncing your own identity – *"who will destroy the soul, he will find it,"* - and that the blessing for people is only in their communion with God and through God among themselves: *"As you are in me and I in you, and they may be one in us."* John. XVII, 21.

I read this fairy tale to children, and they liked it. Among the adults, after reading it, it always rises talks about the most important matters of life. And it seems to me that this is a very good recommendation.

L. Tolstoy.

Pandu, a wealthy jeweler of Brahman caste, was traveling with his servant in Benares. On the way, having caught up with a monk of venerable appearance,

who walked in the same direction, he thought to himself: "This monk has noble and holy look. Communication with good people brings happiness; if he also goes to Benares, I'll invite him to ride with me in my chariot". And, bowing to the monk, he asked him where he was going, and learn that the monk, whose name was Narada goes also to Benares, he invited him in his chariot.

- Thank you for your kindness, - said the monk to the Brahman, - I got really exhausted of the long journey. Having no possessions, I can't reward you with cash, but it may happen that I'll be able to pay you with some spiritual treasure from the wealth of knowledge that I have gained by following the teachings of Sakya Mooney, the blissful great Buddha, a teacher of mankind.

They traveled together in a chariot, and on their way Pandu listened with pleasure educative speeches of Narada. After driving for an hour, they arrived at the place where the road was washed out on both sides and a peasant's wagon with its broken wheel obstructed the road.

Devala, the owner of the wagon, rode to Benares to sell his rice, and hurried to make it before dawn of the next morning. If he'd be late in the afternoon, the rice buyers might had to leave the city, having already purchased all the necessary amount of rice.

When the jeweler saw that he could not continue his way, if the peasant's wagon will not be moved aside, he became angry and ordered Magaduta, his servant, to push the cart out of the way, so that his chariot could pass. The peasant opposed, because his wagon stood too close to a cliff, and the wagon could fall apart if touched, but the Brahmin didn't want to listen to the peasant and ordered his servant who throw the wagon with rice away. Magaduta, unusually strong man, finding pleasure in insulting people, obeyed, and before the monk could stand up for the peasant, thrown the wagon down. When Pandu passed and wanted to continue his journey, the monk jumped out of his chariot and said:

- Excuse me, sir, for leaving you. I thank you for being kind enough to allow me to ride in your chariot for one hour. I was exhausted when you let me in,

but now thanks to your courtesy I have rested. And now that I've recognized in this peasant's incarnation one of your ancestors, I can't do any better to reward you for your kindness, rather than to help him in his misfortune.

The Brahmin gazed at the monk with surprise.

- You say that the peasant is an embodiment of one of my ancestors; this cannot be the case.

- I know, - replied the monk, - that you are not aware of that complex and significant links which connect you with the destiny of this peasant. But as one can't expect from the blind to see, so I feel sorry that you're injuring yourself, and will try to protect you from those wounds that you are going to cause yourself.

The rich merchant wasn't used to being reproached; and feeling that the words of a monk, though spoken with great kindness, contained in themselves a stinging rebuke, he ordered his servant to immediately go on.

Monk of greeted Devala-peasant, and began helping him to fix his wagon and to pick up the spread rice. They managed to do it quickly, and Devala thought:

"This monk must be a holy man, - seems like invisible spirits are helping him. I'll ask him for what I deserved such cruel handling with me by the proud Brahmin".

And he said:

- The venerable sir! Couldn't you tell me, for what I have suffered the injustice of a man to whom I have never done anything bad?

The monk says:

- Kind friend, you didn't have an injustice, but only suffered in the present existence of what you did to this Brahmin in the past life. And I won't be mistaken if I told you that even now you would have done to the Brahmin the

same thing that he did to you, if you were in his place and had the same strong servant.

The peasant confessed that if he had the power, he wouldn't repent after doing to another person barricading the way, just what the Brahmin did to him.

The rice was moved into the wagon, and the monk with the peasant already approached Benares when the horse suddenly jumped aside.

- Snake, snake! Exclaimed the peasant. But the monk closely looked at the subject which scared the horse, jumped off the wagon and saw that it was a wallet, full of gold.

"No one, except the wealthy jeweler, could lose this wallet," - he thought, and took the wallet, and passed it to the peasant, saying:

-Take the wallet and when you're in Benares, come to the hotel, which I will show you, ask for Brahmin Pandu and return the wallet. He will apologize to you for the rudeness of his act, but you tell him that you forgave him and wish him success in all his enterprises, because, believe me, the more successful he will be, the better it is for you. Your fate depends largely on his fate. If Pandu asks you for an explanation, then send him to a monastery where he can always find me in readiness to assist him with an advice, if he needs one.

Meanwhile Pandu arrived in Benares and met Malmeka, his commerce buddy, a wealthy banker.

- I'm dead, - Malmeka said, - and can't do any business anymore if today I won't buy the best rice for the Imperial cuisine. I made a condition with Royal Butler under which I have to provide him this morning with a wagon of rice. But I have an enemy banker here in Benares, who, after learning about my obligation and wishing to destroy me, bought up all the rice in Benares. Royal Butler will not release me from my condition, and tomorrow I'm gone, if Krishna will not send me an Angel from the sky.

While the Malmeka complained about his misfortune, Pandu realized his loss of wallet. After searching his chariot and not finding it, he suspected his servant Magaduta and called the police, accused him, ordered to tie him and brutally tortured him to force his confession. The slave yelled, suffering:

- I am innocent, let me go! I can't endure these torments! I am completely innocent of this crime and suffer for the sins of others! Oh, if I could beg for that peasant's forgiveness, to whom I did evil for the sake of my master! These torment must've been serving punishment for my cruelty.

While police were still beating the servant, the peasant pulled up to the hotel and, to the great surprise of all, handed the wallet. The slave was immediately released from the hands of his tormentors, but being unhappy with his master, he ran away from him and joined a band of robbers living in the mountains. When Malmeka heard that the peasant can sell the best rice, suitable for the King's table, he immediately bought the whole wagon for the triple price, and Pandu, rejoicing in his heart for returning of his money, immediately hurried to the monastery to receive explanations from the monk, which he promised him.

Narada said:

- I could give you an explanation, but knowing that you are not able to understand the spiritual truth, I prefer silence. However, I will give you a general advice: conduct yourself with each person you meet, just as you would with yourself, serve him the same way as you would like to be served. That way, you will sow the seeds of good deeds and a rich harvest of them won't pass you.

- On monk! Give me the explanation, - said Pandu, - and then it'll be easier for me to follow your advice.

And the monk says:

- Then listen, I'll give you the key to the mystery: even if you won't understand it, believe in what I'll tell you. To consider yourself a separate being is a mistake, and one who directs his mind to fulfill the will of this

particular being, follows a false light that would lead him into the abyss of sin. We think of ourselves as individual beings because the veil of Maya dazzles our eyes and prevents us from seeing our unity with the souls of other beings. Few know this truth. Let the following words will be your talisman:

"One who harm others, do evil to himself. One who helps others, does good to himself. Stop regarding yourself as a separate being - and you will get on the path of truth.

For those whose vision is clouded by the veil of Maya, the whole world seems to be sliced in the countless personalities. And such a person may not understand the value of the all-encompassing love for all living things."

Pandu answered:

- Your words, venerable sir, have deep meaning and I will remember them. I did a little good deed, which costed me nothing, for the poor monk during my trip to Benares, and here's what beneficial results it has brought. I owe you a lot, because without you I would have not only lost my wallet, but I could not do in Benares those trade cases that have significantly increased my wealth. In addition, your diligence and the arrival of the wagon of rice contributed to the well-being of my friend Malmeka. If all the people have learned the truth of your rules, how much better would our world be as evil would be decreased and overall well-being would have increased! I wish the truth of Buddha was understood by all, and because of that I want to establish a monastery in my homeland of Kolshambi and invite you to visit me, so that I could devote this place for the brotherhood of the disciples of Buddha.

Years have passed, and Pandu has founded Kolshambi monastery, which became the meeting place for the wise monks and became a famous center of education for the people.

At this time the neighboring king, once he heard of the beauty of precious jewelry made by Pandu, sent to him his treasurer, to order a Crown of pure gold, decorated with the most precious stones of India.

When Pandu finished this work, he went to the capital of the King, hoping to

launch business there, and took with him a large supply of gold. Caravan delivering his jewels was guarded by armed men, but when it reached the mountains, bandits with Magaduta, who became their leader, attacked him, beat the guard and captured all the gems and the gold. Pandu himself barely escaped. This misfortune was a big hit for the well-being of the Pandu: his wealth greatly diminished.

Pandu was very distressed, but tolerated his misfortunes without murmuring; he thought: "I deserve these losses for the sins committed by me in my former life. In my youth, I was cruel to people; and if now I receive the fruits of my own bad deeds, I cannot complain."

Since he became a lot more kind to all beings, this unhappiness only helped him to purify his heart.

More years have passed, and again it happened that Pantaka, a young monk and a disciple of Narada, while traveling in the mountains of Kolshambi, fell into the hands of robbers. Because he did not have any possessions, ataman of the robbers beat him hard and let him go.

The next morning, Pantaka, going through the forest, heard the noise of a battle and, coming to this noise, saw many thieves attacking their chieftain Magaduta.

Magaduta, like a lion surrounded by dogs, fought back from them and killed many of the attackers. But he had too many enemies, and in the end he was defeated and fell to the ground dead, covered with wounds.

As soon as the robbers left, the young monk approached people lying on the ground, wanting to help the wounded. But all the robbers were already dead, only in their boss a little life remained. The monk immediately went to the brook, which ran nearby, brought some fresh water in his pitcher, and passed it to the dying man.

Magaduta opened his eyes and, gritting his teeth, said:

- Where are those ungrateful dogs, whom I many times led to victory and

success? Without me they will soon die, as jackals hunted down by a hunter.

- Do not think about your friends and participants of your sinful life, - Pantaka said, - but think about your soul and take advantage of the opportunity in the last hour, which seems to be presented to you. Here, drink some water, let me wrap your wounds. Maybe I'll be able to save your life.

- It is useless, - Magaduta answered, - I am destined; the rascals fatally wounded me. Ungrateful rascals! They beat me by those blows which I taught them.

- You reap what you sowed, - the monk continued. - If you have taught your fellows the good deeds, you would have received from them good deeds, too. But you taught them killing, and because of that, you're killed through your deeds by their hands.

- You're right, - replied the ataman of the robbers, - I deserved this fate, but my load is so heavy that I'll have to reap the fruits of all my bad deeds in the future lives. Teach me, holy father, what can I do to ease my life of sins, which pressure me, like a rock fallen on my chest.

And Pantaka said:

- Eliminate your sinful desires, defeat your evil passions, and fill your soul with goodness for all beings.

Ataman said:

- I've been doing a lot of evil and didn't do any good deeds. How can I get out of the network of grief that I made with the evil desires of my heart? My karma would lead me to hell, and I'll never be able to embark on the path of salvation.

And the monk said:

- Yes, your karma will reap, in future incarnations, the fruits of those seeds you have sown. There's no escape for the doer of bad deeds from the

consequences of his bad actions. But don't despair: anyone can be saved, but only on the condition that he uproots out of himself his deception of an individual. As an example of this, I will tell you the story of the great robber Kandata, who died unrepentant and was born again as a devil in hell, where he went through the most terrible sufferings for his evil deeds. He was already in hell for many years and could not get rid of his plight, when Buddha appeared on Earth and reached the state of blissful enlightenment. At this memorable time the rays of light fell and reached hell, rising life and hope in all demons, and robber Kandata loudly yelled, "Oh blissful Buddha, take pity on me! I'm suffering terribly; and although I was doing evil, I wish now to go on the path of righteousness. But I can't extricate myself from the network of grief; help me, Lord, take pity on me!" The law of karma is that evil deeds lead to perdition.

When the Buddha heard the request of the demon suffering in hell, he sent to him a spider on the web, and the spider said: "Take grip of my web and get on it out from hell". When the spider disappeared from the view, Kandata clutched his web and started climbing. The web was so strong that was not breaking, and he was raising by it higher and higher. And suddenly he felt that the thread began to tremble and falter, because other sufferers started to climb on the web as well. Kandata was frightened; he saw the subtlety of the web and saw that it stretched from the increased weight. But the web still kept him. Earlier, Kandata only looked up, but now he looked down and saw that innumerable crowd of inhabitants of hell climbing on the web. "How can this fine thread hold the weight of all these people," – he thought, and, frightened, yelled loudly: "Let go of the web, it's mine!" And suddenly the spider web broke, and Kandata fell back to hell. Misleading identity still lived in Kandata. He did not know the marvelous force of the genuine desire to go up to embark on the path of righteousness. This desire is subtle, like a spider's Web, but it will lift millions of people, and the more people get on the web, the easier it will be for each of them. But once a thought would arise in the human heart, that this web is mine, that blessing of the righteousness belongs to me alone and let nobody share it with me, the thread breaks, and you fall back to the previous state of a separate being. Separation of a personality is a curse, and unity is a blessing. What is hell? Hell is nothing like self-love, and nirvana is life for all.

- Let me grasp the web, - said the dying ataman of the robbers Magaduta, when the monk had finished his story, - and I will get out of the depths of hell.

Magaduta spent a few minutes in silence, gathering his thoughts, and Magaduta continued:

- Listen to me, I'll confess to you. I was a servant of Pandu, a jeweler from Kolshambi. But after he had punished me unjustly, I ran away from him and became the head of robbers. Some time ago I learned from my scouts that he passes through the mountains, and I robbed him, took most of his possessions. Go now to him and tell him that I forgave him from the bottom of my heart for the insult that he unfairly caused me, and I ask him to forgive me for robbing him. When I lived with him, his heart was harsh as stone, and I learned from him his selfishness. I have heard that he has now become a good-natured man and an example of kindness and justice. I don't want to remain indebted to him; so tell him that I saved his golden crown, which he made for the King, and all his treasures, and hid them in a dungeon. Only two of the robbers knew this place, and now they're both dead; let Pandu take with him armed men and come to this site and take back his possessions, which I've stole from him.

Then Magaduta told where the dungeon was, and died at the hands of Pantaka.

As soon as the young monk Pantaka returned to Kolshambi, he went to the jeweler and told him everything that happened in the forest.

And Pandu went with armed men to the dungeon and took from there all the treasures that ataman hid. And they buried him with honors, and so his killed comrades, and Pantaka, referring to the words of the Buddha, said the following over the tomb:

"Personality does evil, and the personality suffers from it.

Once a personality refrains from evil, it purifies.

Purity and impurity belong to a personality: no one can purify another.

Man himself must make an effort; the Buddhas are only preachers."

"Our karma, - also said monk Pantaka, - is not a product of Shivery, or Brahmi, or Indre, or any of the gods, - our karma is the consequence of our actions.

My activity has a womb, which carries me, it is a legacy that is given to me, is the curse of my evil deeds and the blessings of my righteousness. My work is the only mean to my salvation."

Pandu brought all his treasures back to Kolshambi, and spending his so unexpectedly returned wealth little by little, he peacefully and happily lived for the rest of his life, and when he was dying, already in elder years, and all of his sons, daughters and grandchildren gathered near him, he said to them:

- My dear children, don't blame others for your failures. Look for the cause of your misfortunes in yourselves. And if you're not blinded by vanity, you'll find it, and by finding it, you will be able to get rid of the evil. The cure against your misfortunes is in yourselves. Let your mental gaze be never covered by the veil of Maya... Remember those words that were the talisman of my life:

"Whoever hurts another, does evil to themselves.

One who helps another, helps himself.

Let the deception of an individuality disappear - and you'll get on the path of righteousness."